



Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies

Volume 3

Article 16

2020

Simon Gilson. 'Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy. Florence, Venice and the 'Divine Poet'.' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018; 'Leggere Dante a Firenze. Da Boccaccio a Cristoforo Landino (1350-1481).' Trans. Giulia Gaimari. Ed. Anna Pegoretti. Frecce, 286. Rome: Carocci, 2019.

Natale Vacalebre
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant>



Part of the [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Italian Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Medieval History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vacalebre, Natale (2020) "Simon Gilson. 'Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy. Florence, Venice and the 'Divine Poet'.' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018; 'Leggere Dante a Firenze. Da Boccaccio a Cristoforo Landino (1350-1481).' Trans. Giulia Gaimari. Ed. Anna Pegoretti. Frecce, 286. Rome: Carocci, 2019.," *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*: Vol. 3 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol3/iss1/16>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol3/iss1/16>
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

death, the Laura-trace was copied at least 82 times, being occasionally translated in the vernacular because of its connection with the *Canzoniere* and the *Trionfi* (and it was not the only Petrarchean trace to have such a vibrant afterlife). This reception caused a shift in the meaning of the brief text, which lost its original moralizing tone. The Harleyean trace, instead, is notable because includes Petrarch's name, offering Signorini the opportunity to deepen her discussion on Petrarch's authority.

The book is completed by a treasurable final section, in which Signorini offers an edition of the texts, chronologically organized. Crucially, the edition is accompanied by short commentaries and photographic reproductions which further allow to directly appreciate the brilliance of Signorini's analysis.

This is a refined piece of scholarship, wonderfully written and researched, that enriches our understanding of Petrarch as a writer and as an author.

Eva Del Soldato, *University of Pennsylvania*

Simon Gilson.

Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy. Florence, Venice and the 'Divine Poet'. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. XIV + 434 pp. \$120.

Leggere Dante a Firenze. Da Boccaccio a Cristoforo Landino (1350-1481).

Trans. Giulia Gaimari. Ed. Anna Pegoretti.

Frecce, 286. Rome: Carocci, 2019. 333 pp. €28.

Fifteen years ago, Simon Gilson gave new freshness to studies on Dante's reception in the early modern age with his *Dante and Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). In that dense and harmonious volume, Gilson analyzed Dante's fortune between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries through studying how several generations of educated Florentine citizens had absorbed and re-used the figure of the poet in the city's cultural context. Italian readers will therefore be delighted to see the first Italian translation of this classic of contemporary Dante criticism finally published. The book released by Carocci does not only contain the translated text of the 2005 volume. The pages of this elegant book from the bright red cover contain an updated version of the work, superbly edited by Anna Pegoretti, which takes into account the most recent publications on the reception of Dante's work. This element makes Gilson's work even more precious, especially if one considers the extraordinary development in recent years of studies on Dante's reception in the early modern age.

Shortly before the release of the Italian edition of *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, Gilson provided his audience with another fundamental text on Dante's fortune—a work that is not only the ideal complement to his previous volume, but also the most complete historical tool on the intricate reception of Dante's works in the “Century of Petrarch.” *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy* represents an

indispensable compass for navigating the tricky waters of Dante's sixteenth-century fortunes in Italy. The geographical focus of the work consists of the two most important cultural and commercial centers of Renaissance Italy: Florence and Venice. Gilson's analysis focuses on the critical responses and publishing initiatives that developed in the cultural circles of the peninsula between the publication of Cristoforo Landino's *Comento sopra la Commedia* (Florence, 1481) and the realization of the monumental editions of Dante's works edited by the great sixteenth-century Italian polygraphs, such as Francesco Sansovino and Lodovico Dolce. The path through which the author leads us is probed through the leitmotif of the centuries-old relationship between *res et verba* ("words" and "things"), that is between the formal properties and the philosophical content of Dante's texts. These elements, according to Gilson, have historically constituted the pivots on which the literary debate about Dante's work was focused in the century of Bembo and Manuzio and which caused the decline of the poet's fortune between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

One of the most outstanding achievements of this book is dealing with the reading and dissemination of Dante's work through the cultural perspective of producers, educated readers and scholars of sixteenth-century Italy. The contextualization recreated by Gilson is exemplary. Each chapter provides a rigorous and careful historical reconstruction of cultural environments and circles of dissemination of Dante's texts, giving back to the modern reader the experience of Renaissance reading and debate about the greatest Tuscan poet. Florence and Venice are the undisputed protagonists of the study and analytical development of the book. The first two chapters lead the reader into the dimension of Dante's Renaissance publishing. In chapter one Gilson illustrates the extraordinary perspective transformations in the reception of the *Commedia* developed since the publication of the first Venetian editions of Landino's *Comento*. The large folio editions designed by skilled printers such as Ottaviano Scoto and Bernardino Benali constituted the book model through which the dissemination of the *Commedia* was canonized—a model that was not replaced even after the enormous commercial success of the *enchiridia* printed by Aldo Manuzio, edited by Pietro Bembo. However, the text of the 1502 Aldine edition was the one that every sixteenth-century Italian printer associated with Landino's commentary; this, despite the exegetical work, presented many discordances with the text edited by Bembo. Gilson develops an equally accurate analysis of paratextual features in the following chapter, dedicated to *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Convivio*. This section shows how the reception of Dante's "minor works" was guided by various factors such as the *problema della lingua* in the 1520s or the critical practice of reading Dante's masterpiece through the poet's other works. Chapters three and four lead the reader into the circles of Florentine academies, introducing them to the lively debate about Dante and his work in the second half of the sixteenth century in the poet's homeland. The final chapters of the book take us back to the commercial capital of Renaissance Italy. In these pages Gilson impeccably recreates the literary and publishing genesis of the major sixteenth-century Italian commentaries on the *Commedia*—the *Esposizioni* by Alessandro Vellutello (1544) and Bernardino Daniello (1565). Simultaneously he explores Venetian printed culture by leading the reader into the workshops of the late-sixteenth-century polygraphs and exploring their relationship with Dante's universe.

By carefully examining the many cultural, social, and economic contexts in which Dante was circulated, and the different characteristics of the readers for whom those editions were created and designed, Gilson offers his readers a work of the highest historical value. However, *Reading Dante in Renaissance Italy* is not only an exceptional text of contemporary Dante criticism. It is indeed an indispensable research tool and a fundamental model for future investigations on the history of the material reception of literary texts in the Italian Renaissance. There is no doubt that it will be read and consulted by many specialists, students, and non-academic readers in the years to come.

Natale Vacalebre, *University of Pennsylvania*

James Hankins.

Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. XXIII + 736 pp. \$45.

Is there in Italy, in the period comprised between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century, any “political thought” worthy of the name? Is it possible to find elements that have any traction from the perspective of political philosophy in the writings of Petrarch, Boccaccio, Leonardo Bruni, or Leon Battista Alberti – not to mention much lesser known writers such as Roberto Valturio or Mario Salamonio? Is there any room for these authors in the histories of Western political thought? James Hankins’s view, admittedly not the dominant one in current scholarship, is resolutely positive. For Hankins, not only did a truly political thought exist in Renaissance Italy, but it was also a coherent one, at least in its fundamental features. What all Italian Renaissance authors writing about politics had in common was a deep-rooted concern with the problem of moral education, a problem that was, in turn, firmly anchored in the concept of virtue. What Hankins calls “Italian humanist political thought” was “a movement stimulated by a crisis of legitimacy in late medieval Italy and by a widespread disgust with its political and religious leadership.” Italian political writers of the time all shared a wide, and often bitter, experience with tyranny, so that they took on the mission of rebuilding Italy’s “depleted reserves of good character, true piety, and practical wisdom” (p. XV). They also found in the classical world, which they worked industriously to revive, an inspiring model, full of examples of moral nobility, political wisdom, and selfless dedication to country. Whether in the capacity of political advisors (as in the case of Petrarch) or by actually occupying political offices (like Bruni), humanist political writers put moral reform at the very center of their political agendas, their mission being to build a new (even if revived from the ancients) and uncorrupt virtue politics.

In more than seven-hundred pages, Hankins’s book outlines the main trajectories of what can be considered as a comprehensive history of Italian humanist political thought. The book consists of twenty chapters, plus a conclusion and a section of appendixes. The first four chapters serve as theoretical foundation for the